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### Growing in the Family : Toward Adulthood

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# *Growing in the Family*

TOWARD ADULthood



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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

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# Growing in the family *toward adulthood*

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"Growing up"—magic words to all youngsters, their parents and other adults who know them—and more easily said than done! These years of later adolescence and early adulthood involve a stage of in-between-ness, an era of marking time. Our society requires more time to grow up before an individual is admitted to adulthood than ever before in history. Both parents and youngsters are bothered by this period's indefiniteness, are troubled with knowing when this important step is achieved.

The central theme of this stage of life is finding one's self and one's place in the world. This is a big order when considered in the light of today's complex way of living. The fact that a teen-ager becomes a man about three years **before** his parents think he does and about two years **after** he thinks he does further confuses the issue!

A person is grown-up when society accepts and treats him as an adult. A youngster can read the state of his own maturity in the attitudes and reactions of teachers, parental friends, uncles and aunts, employers, and others—especially strangers. When he sees that people begin to take his adulthood for granted, he begins to play the part better. Adults can best help the adolescent by treating him as an adult as much as possible. At the same time they must not put him so much on his own that he is overcome by anxiety.

Some say "the youth of today are irresponsible," that "nothing serious ever enters their heads," and so on. Can these claims be taken seriously? In answer to this question, consider what recent studies tell us young adults are thinking about. Here are some of their comments and replies:

MARRIAGE. "How long should people know each other before getting married?" "What are the things that cause trouble in marriage?"



**JOBBS.** "How much ability do I really have?" "What kind of training do I need for different jobs?"

**RELIGION.** "How can I live up to my religion in today's world?" "What responsibility do I have to other people in my community?"

**PERSONAL PROBLEMS.** "I wish I knew how to get along better with others." "How can I learn to develop initiative?" "I wish I could help my parents to stop worrying."

**CITIZENSHIP.** "How can I help make the world a better place?" "How can we cut crime and divorce rates?"

Yes, today's youngsters are doing some concentrated, realistic thinking about the future. In spite of the doubts, young people are concerned about the future. In their eagerness for independence they may seem to reject advice and help. Yet, we can be sure that they want it. Without help, how else can they secure worthwhile independence? But, help and advice take patience and understanding—understanding of the many factors which play a part in the development of a young adult.

## PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CHANGES

At about 18 or so, the sudden growth of adolescence tapers off. There is little increase in height or weight. Body proportions seem to adjust themselves: the chest broadens, the trunk lengthens and earlier awkwardness gives way to co-ordination and control that makes for grace and beauty. Above all, those hated skin blemishes are likely to disappear!

There is a considerable difference in muscular strength between the sexes. For example, girls usually prefer less violent sports while boys like the rough and tumble of football and other action sports. Of course, girls love to watch, making the boys play even harder!

Physical and mental reactions of young adults are at a peak. There is an alertness which makes them think and act more quickly. Although learning goes on for the rest of life, the **capacity** to learn has now been fully developed. Sexual maturity has already been reached. Physical growth may have ended, but growth will continue in other ways—in knowledge,

judgment, getting along with others, independence, etc. It's this mental and social growth that leads to maturity.

## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHANGES**

Adolescents want to conform. They want to be like the gang. When they become young adults their need to conform becomes less intense. They still go with their own crowd, have dances, go on dates, wear the "right" clothes, and so on; but unlike the adolescent, they are somewhat flattered to be thought of as "different." While they continue to enjoy the security of the crowd, they also like being left by themselves, to enjoy doing things on their own, or with a close friend of the same sex. Dating is also being narrowed down to someone "special."

Anger is a common teenage emotion. There are so many adult things to learn that mistakes and blunders are inevitable. These lead to embarrassment, humiliation and anger. Young adults usually express their anger in words through sarcastic remarks, fault-finding and vehement self-defense. Emotional control is developing when rigorous sport or physical work is used to "let off steam." In closer and more intimate relations with people, young adults learn how to accept and to offer love, free from the earlier childish demands and restrictions. These, too, are steps to maturity.

Although childhood fears may now be outgrown, anxiousness—even though disguised or hidden—can often be seen. This is not surprising, considering the many insecurities and uncertainties of adult life.

## **THEY'RE ADULTS NOW**

Often parents do not realize that their child is now grown up and must make his own decisions—and take the responsibility for them. This is especially true when the son or daughter is still living at home. Some parents find it hard to give up their long-held authority, mainly because they don't trust their son's or daughter's judgment. Or perhaps they are parents with little ability to give and take, who find it difficult to cooperate with others. In other cases, the young people are at fault. When they are unreliable or irresponsible, they discourage adult trust.



However, difficulties which develop usually stem from differences on both sides. Young people need to understand parents, remembering that legally, their parents may still be held responsible for them. In their impatience to grow up, they can forget that their parents also need time to get used to this young adult who, only yesterday, was their child. Part of growing up and becoming mature is developing patience, being satisfied with compromise, and respecting the feelings of others. Parents, too, need these qualities. They also need to see that they no longer treat their son or daughter as a dependent child. Young people yearn for independence. By treating them as adults and respecting their opinions, parents discover that irritating stubbornness soon gives way to cooperation and willingness to compromise. Good listening on both sides is essential.

## DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

People in the late adolescent or early adult period of life have certain skills to acquire and problems to solve just as do all other age groups throughout the life cycle. These steps that must be taken by each person before he goes on to further achievement are called **developmental tasks**. Everyone has a set of these tasks that are the particular learning needs for his age and sex. Each person must accomplish these tasks in some way before he is ready to go on to life's next learning task.

The period of early adulthood is recognized as the fullest of teachable moments and it is possibly the time that is emptiest of efforts to teach. Because this is also a time of special sensitivity and unusual readiness to learn, it is unfortunate that more effort is not made to meet this great need. There is much to be learned and experienced during the ages of 18 to 30. Early adulthood usually contains marriage, the first pregnancy, the first serious full-time job, the first illness of children, the first venturing of a child off to school, and the first experience of buying or building a house. Does not the individual need help with these tasks as well as the earlier ones?

Here are the major **developmental tasks** of all young adults between the ages of 18 to 30:

**Selecting a mate.** This is the task of the young man or woman rather than of the parents.

**Learning to live with a marriage partner.** This is primarily learning to express and control one's feelings.

**Starting a family.** There is much involved here with values and skills. Activities in decision-making areas such as self-acceptance, working mothers, breastfeeding, sex life during pregnancy, desire for a "perfect" child, fear of losing a child, choosing a doctor, and husband's need to know child care . . . all need consideration. (To mention only a few.)

**Rearing children.** What practices will be used? How will parents manage? Success or failure is a reflection of parent's own peace of mind and a harmonious adjustment or lack of it.

**Managing a home.** This means more than keeping a house clean, things in repair, having well-cooked meals, etc. It is becoming the task these days of both the husband and the wife.

**Getting started in an occupation.** This takes time and energy for the young man or woman.

**Taking on civic responsibility.** Can be in a neighborhood, school, church, or service group of some kind. Some people never accomplish this task in their development.

### **Finding a congenial social group.**

There are also certain groups who face special problems such as juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual promiscuity and perversion, and separation and divorce, to name only a few. These are increasing among young people at such a rate as to become a serious threat to the continued healthy growth and stability of the nation.

## **OTHER INFLUENCES**

Whether considering the so-called normal problems or the more unusual ones just mentioned, we recognize that the social and economic changes occurring all about us have an enormous effect on the lives of young adult home builders and parents. The following is only a partial listing of these changes and



their results which call for help and guidance on the part of most people:

**Population growth:** Overcrowding, congestion, closer and more frequent contacts, both in the home and community.

**Population mobility:** Uprooting of families, urbanization, suburbanization.

**Increased production of things:** High-powered advertisement and salesmanship, increasing standard of living, rising costs.

**Increased ease of living:** Lack of chores for children, increased softness of youth and adults.

**Increase in women workers:** Lack of child care and supervision.

**Occupational changes:** Longer time required for preparation, more frequent changes in character of job, greater uncertainty, need for constant adjustment.

**Increase in leisure time:** Shorter work-day and work-week, and longer vacations, lack of preparation for constructive use of leisure time, growth of commercialized use of leisure time.

**Growth in mass media:** Unfavorable effects resulting from excessive amount of time listening to radio and viewing TV.

**Rising spirit of youth:** Inability of parents to cope with problems.

In view of the powerful impact of these forces, the young adult frequently develops a sense of tension, anxiety, conflict, and insecurity. This often leads to uncertainty, apathy, and fear. Certainly this age-group needs all of the knowledge and counseling that we in society can give them about marital life; about home management, including budgeting, system and organization of housekeeping, and family chores; about family recreation; about interpersonal and inter-group relations between and among parents and children, parents and grandparents, children and grandparents; about diet, and physical and mental health; and about preparation for aging. Ways that young adults discover to handle these areas of living will greatly affect the happiness and stability of the

family. It is surprising how many persons need and yearn for help in one or more of these areas.

## ON BECOMING MATURE

Maturity is much more than growing up, reaching 21, or being on one's own. There is no precise moment from which maturity can be dated. Few people, whether at 21 or 90, are ever fully mature in everything. We may come close to maturity in some things but remain less mature in others. We each have strengths and weaknesses and when we speak of someone being "mature" we usually mean that his strengths more than balance his weaknesses.

These strengths, or qualities, will vary from person to person. To be reasonably mature, a young man or woman is probably expected to have developed some of the following qualities in greater or lesser degree:

- To be able to accept people as they are and get along with them reasonably well.

- To handle his feelings with a minimum of emotion, being able to gracefully give and to accept criticism.

- To make independent decisions and accept their consequences.

- To be dependable, reliable and responsible.

- To satisfactorily plan his time, budget his spendings, and arrange his leisure.

- To participate in the social life of the neighborhood, church, school and other organizations.

These are some qualities of maturity; others, of course, could be added. As young adults grow older, their experience adds to their maturity, making them less subject to the ups and downs of adolescence and so more stable, confident and comfortable with themselves and with others.

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